

Testimony of Bruce Cole
Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities
Before the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to this committee again on behalf of the budget request of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Administration and the NEH are requesting an appropriation totaling \$162,000,000 for fiscal year 2005. This funding includes a request for \$33,000,000 for our *We the People* initiative to encourage the teaching, study, and understanding of American history and culture. We also request \$89,932,000 for our core grant programs in support of high quality education, research, preservation, and public programming in the humanities and for the projects and programs of the state humanities councils. A total of \$16,122,000 in matching funds is requested to stimulate and match private, nonfederal donations in support of humanities institutions and individual humanities projects. Finally, we request \$22,946,000 for administrative expenses necessary to operate the agency efficiently and effectively.

I want to thank the members for their support and for the new funding that was provided for the initiative for the current fiscal year. This funding is helping us to make significant progress in our efforts to increase Americans' understanding of their history and culture.

It is hard to overstate the importance of this mission. Understanding our history is essential to our national identity. Across the country today, Americans are confronted with questions about our past, our ideals, our place in the world, and our future—questions that the humanities can help to answer. The NEH exists to help foster the wisdom and understanding essential for our democracy to flourish.

The *We the People* initiative is already making a significant impact across the nation. Since its launch a year and a half ago, we have made 180 grants to high quality projects that were submitted to our core programs. These include collected editions of the papers of James Madison, Thomas Edison, Frederick Douglass, and the First Federal Congress; television documentaries on John and Abigail Adams, Thurgood Marshall, and Ernest Hemingway; summer seminars and institutes for school teachers on "Colonial Life and the American Revolution," "African Americans and the Making of America, 1650-2000," and "Political and Constitutional Theory for Citizens;" the creation of an electronic database on electoral returns for 1788-1825; public programs in 85 rural communities that explore themes related to the Lewis and Clark Expedition; *Sailors Speak*, a multimedia exhibition about life on board the *U.S.S. Constitution* in the 19th century; and an NEH Challenge grant to assist private fundraising for humanities programs at Fort Ticonderoga, site of the first American victory of the Revolutionary War.

In addition, a number of special grant opportunities keyed to *We the People* have been established within the Endowment's program divisions. The new "Landmarks of American History" program in our Education Programs division is supporting enrichment workshops for K-12 teachers at key historical sites around the nation. We announced the program's first awards for seventeen workshops earlier this year. More than 2,000 teachers will travel to these seventeen

historic sites in sixteen states this summer where they will study with leading scholars. These teachers will be immersed in our nation's history at landmarks such as Pearl Harbor, Mount Vernon, the U.S. Capitol, Andrew Jackson's Hermitage, and the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Alabama, one of the pivotal sites of the Civil Rights era. Participants will learn history on the very soil where history was made. Just as important, they will form networks with teachers from all over America who share their passion for bringing history alive in their classrooms.

This new program has generated much support from teachers and the educational community. Directors of the projects have received an impressive number of applications from teachers wanting to participate in these initial workshops. The workshop at Mount Vernon, for example, received 230 applications for 100 places. The 2,000 teachers who will participate in these projects represent a three-fold increase in the number of professional development opportunities the agency offers to school teachers.

Another key component of the initiative is our *We the People Bookshelf* program, which encourages America's children to read classic works of history, biography, and fiction. Last year, we announced the beginning of this new project and a list of 15 recommended books, all organized around the theme of "courage," and all telling us something about America's history, culture, and ideals. We then invited school and local libraries throughout the country to apply to receive free copies of these books. We also asked the libraries to plan programs for young people that integrate the books, the theme of courage, and their local communities.

The response was overwhelming. Just a few weeks ago, I announced the first round of awards to 500 libraries all across America including McDowell County Public Library in Marion, North Carolina; Wishkah Valley School Library Media Center in Aberdeen, Washington; Stark County District Library in Canton, Ohio; and Signal Mountain Public Library in Signal Mountain, Tennessee. In recognition of the high number of applications to the program's initial deadline, we added a second deadline and doubled the number awards we plan to make in FY 2004. In addition to the bookshelf, each awardee will receive supplemental materials to help with publicity and the organization of public programs tied to the readings. Each year the *We the People Bookshelf* program will explore a different theme; a new theme and list of books for the second annual competition will be announced later this spring.

Other NEH program divisions have developed *We the People* programs as well. The NEH's Public Programs division announced two new grant opportunities including "America's Historic Places," to support projects that use historic sites to address themes central to American history; and "Family and Youth Programs in American History," to support projects encouraging intergenerational learning about significant topics in U.S. history and culture. The NEH Challenge Grants program is offering special awards for educational and cultural institutions to strengthen their programs that advance knowledge of the founding principles of the United States. The Endowment will make awards for all of these new grant opportunities this summer.

The linchpin in our efforts to extend the reach of the initiative is our partnership with the state humanities councils. The state councils have enthusiastically embraced the goals of the initiative and are invaluable in extending its reach and ensuring it reflects the needs and interests of citizens across the nation. Since we announced the initiative, the councils have been working hard to put their own *We the People* efforts in place: The North Carolina Council is enhancing reading and discussion programs in small towns and rural libraries all over the state; the Washington State council plans to commemorate the anniversaries of *Brown vs. Board of Education* and the Lewis and Clark expedition; the Ohio Humanities Council will expand its

Chautauqua series, which this year is focused on “The Roaring Twenties”; and the Utah Humanities Council will enhance its participation in National History Day. To further these efforts, we have provided \$3.2 million in appropriated *We the People* funds, plus \$560,000 in matching funds, to the 56 state councils to help them develop local and statewide projects and programs on American history, culture, and principles.

The Endowment also launched the “Idea of America” essay contest, an annual competition that encourages students to learn and write about the nation's history and democratic principles. The initial contest asked 11th grade students to write an original essay on “how a significant event in our nation’s history illustrates a principle of American democracy.” First Lady Laura Bush awarded medals to the grand prize winner and five runners-up at a special ceremony. For the 2004 competition, students were asked to address the question: “How does President Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address reflect America’s founding ideas, and what is the relevance of the speech today?” We will be announcing awards to six students this fall.

Also notable was the inaugural NEH “Heroes of History” lecture, which was delivered by the distinguished American historian, Robert V. Remini. The “Heroes of History” lecture, in which an acclaimed humanities scholar tells the story of heroic figures in American life was sponsored in conjunction with the White House. Professor Remini, who is currently writing a history of the U.S. House of Representatives, spoke on the topic “Ordinary Heroes: Founders of Our Republic.” The second annual lecture will be delivered later this year.

With the funds we have requested for *We the People* for FY 2005, we will be able to expand our support for American history and culture throughout the agency and fully fund these and other new program offerings.

Our newest *We the People* program is being launched this week. I am pleased to report that the NEH and Library of Congress recently entered into an agreement to support a new *National Digital Newspaper Program*. This long-term program will support grants to convert microfilm of U.S. newspapers into fully searchable digital files and mount the files on the Internet. Teachers will be able to access and integrate these materials into their lesson plans and classroom instruction; parents will be able to sit down with their children to learn about the people and events that have shaped the nation; scholars will have ready access to essential primary source materials; and citizens of all ages will be able to access this vast storehouse of information about the great experiment in freedom and democracy that is America.

NEH and Library of Congress staff are now finalizing the details of this multi-year project; we hope to award the first grants in FY 2005. The two agencies will share responsibilities: Through our Preservation and Access division, we will invite grant proposals, evaluate applications, make awards, and administer the grants; the Library of Congress will provide technical support and mount and maintain the database of digitized files on its website. This will be a permanent resource for the American people and for education, scholarship, and public programming in the humanities.

The funds requested for *We the People* for FY 2005 also will allow us to put other key components of the initiative in place, including a major expansion of NEH Summer Seminars and Institutes on topics related to the initiative; support for projects to help schools establish or improve course offerings in American history and culture; support for projects to digitize previously published American editions and reference works; and to establish an annual national history competition for schoolchildren similar to the National Spelling Bee.

The FY 2005 budget request also will enable us to add to the exemplary record of our core functions of advancing scholarship, education, preservation and access to intellectual and cultural resources, and public understanding in all fields and disciplines of the humanities. We also will continue extending the reach of our programs to ensure that Americans of all backgrounds and from all regions are able to learn more about the humanities. NEH outreach programs have been successful in building the capacity of small and mid-size institutions to mount quality humanities programs and have resulted in many new grantees to the Endowment--two outcomes the agency continues to pursue.

Last year NEH awarded funds to approximately 1,000 humanities projects covering all states of the nation, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and U.S. territories. The products of NEH grants, as well as projects funded through the state humanities councils, annually reach millions of Americans of diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. In addition to the *We the People* projects I have already mentioned, some of our other noteworthy accomplishments in FY 2003 and FY 2004 to date include:

- Nearly 1,100 teachers from every state of the nation participated in NEH-supported summer seminars and institutes during the summer of 2003. The ultimate beneficiaries of these projects are the thousands of students who will be taught each year by these intellectually reinvigorated teachers. NEH's education programs are based on the idea that students benefit most when their teachers have a mastery of their disciplines and are themselves actively engaged in learning. Teacher-participants in recent seminars and institutes have come from a wide array of schools and colleges across the country, including Eastfield Elementary in Marion, North Carolina; Tacoma Community College in Tacoma, Washington; the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga in Chattanooga, Tennessee; and the Jersey Shore Area Senior High School in Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania.
- Major support was provided for projects that are preserving fragile books and historically significant U.S. newspapers on microfilm. When all currently funded microfilming preservation grants are completed, NEH will have helped to preserve the intellectual content of more than one million endangered books and 66 million pages of embrittled newspapers.
- NEH also is playing a key role in preserving the cultural heritage infrastructure of Iraq. In 2003, we announced a special initiative, "Restoring Iraq's Past," to support projects to preserve and document cultural resources in Iraq's archives, libraries, and museums, or to disseminate information relating to the bibliographic records of civilization in Iraq from the earliest times to the present. We have just awarded grants to six projects under this special competition; additional grants will be made later this spring.
- In FY 2003 the 56 state humanities councils supported thousands of high quality humanities projects that reached millions of Americans. These programs included reading and discussion programs, speakers' bureau presentations, preservation and local history projects, films, exhibitions, teacher institutes and workshops, literacy programs, and Chautauqua-type historical performances. Whether through grant-making or their own programs, state humanities councils strengthen the cultural and educational infrastructure of their states by reaching into rural areas, urban

neighborhoods, and suburban communities. As noted previously, the councils also are developing extensive plans to complement the *We the People* initiative.

- In addition to the collected papers of noted Americans, other awards made in the last year for scholarly editions, research tools, and reference works include the Dead Sea Scrolls; the writings of Thomas Carlyle; an edition of important Middle English poetry and prose written between 1200 and 1550; a collection of the correspondence of Charles Darwin; dictionaries on the Aramaic and Sumerian languages; and an encyclopedia of Jewish history and culture in Eastern Europe.
- Recent award-winning NEH-supported film documentaries include *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow*, a series exploring segregation and the African-American struggle for equality, and the multi-part film biography, *Benjamin Franklin*, which received an Emmy award for outstanding non-fiction special. Films currently in production include *The Rape of Europa*, on the theft, destruction, and survival of Europe's art treasures during the Second World War; *Remembering Korea*, an examination of the legacy of the Korean War; and a series on the meaning of democracy, focusing on issues first raised in Alexis de Tocqueville's famous *Democracy in America*.
- Museum exhibitions and reading programs provided opportunities for Americans to engage in lifelong learning in the humanities, such as *Machu Picchu: Unveiling the Mystery of the Incas* and *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece: Images of Children from the Classical Past*. The Endowment is supporting a number of traveling exhibitions and programs that are reaching people all across the nation, including *Elizabeth I: Ruler and Legend*; *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*; and *Assimilating America: The Life and Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer*.
- In FY 2003 the Endowment released more than \$8.34 million in Challenge Grant funds to match more than \$25 million in private, nonfederal contributions to institutions with long-term plans to enhance their humanities activities. The agency released another \$6.3 million in funds to match donations to other NEH-supported humanities projects. Encouraging private-sector support for cultural activities is an important goal of the Administration and of Congress, and NEH Treasury funds and Challenge Grants have proven to be an effective means of leveraging private contributions on behalf of the humanities.

As we commemorate the 40th anniversary of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Endowment will continue to encourage and support humanities projects and programs of the scope and depth represented by these grants. Americans from every state and region of the country will be served by the projects our budget will support.

These are of course difficult times when it comes to the federal budget. Every dollar counts. But I am convinced that the funds we are requesting represent a wise investment of public funds that will yield important dividends for the nation.

Let me thank the committee again for this opportunity to describe our plans and priorities for FY 2005. I very much appreciate your continued support for our mission and programs, and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.